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# The One Dollar Life

By Yanki Tauber

What is the most spiritual thing you own?

Your home? Your car? Obviously not. Maybe your books? Perhaps a religious object with which you loose yourself from your everyday existence to commune with a higher reality?

Open your wallet. Take out a single dollar bill. Place it on the table in front of you. Take a long, contemplative look at it.

In many ways, this is the most spiritual thing in your possession.

But first we should explain what we mean by "spiritual." The definitions of "material" and "spiritual" vary, of course, by the context in which the terms are used. But a fairly common definition would be that the material things are concrete and discrete, while the more abstract and encompassing a thing is, the more spiritual it is.

What, in essence, is money? The ultimate abstraction of the human product. One person expends his time, energy and talent baking bread. A second writes poetry. A third and fourth and fifth carpenters furniture, grows tomatoes and writes legal briefs. Others drive trucks, teach schoolchildren, manage sales crews, pour steel, concoct medicines, repair power lines or debate philosophy. Each of these things, on its own, is concrete and discrete, confined to itself. A page of poetry will not produce a loaf of bread, and a bushel of tomatoes will not light a road at night. But the human being has found a way to abstract all these things to their common essence -- to a unit of human creativity and need. Thus abstracted, they can be transferred, bartered, converted.

Look again at the piece of paper on the table in front of you. What is it? It's a loaf of bread, a minute of wisdom, a dozen kilowatt hours of electricity, half a glass of wine, a tenth of a toy, a twenty-thousandth of a car, a three-hundred-millionth of a Van Gogh. A piece of human life that can be folded and put in your pocket.

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But there is also another definition of spirituality: that which brings you closer to G-d. In this sense, too, money can be the most spiritual thing you possess.

The Torah includes 613 mitzvot -- six hundred and thirteen actions which, because G-d has willed that we do them, connect us with Him. But when our sages say simply "the mitzvah," they are referring to the mitzvah of charity.



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In his Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains: Each mitzvah binds a person to G-d via a specific limb, faculty and area of his life. When we study Torah, for example, our brain and our intellect are the vehicles which come to embody the divine will and connect us with G-d. Praying employs our faculty of speech and the emotion of love in our hearts. Other mitzvot employ our hands or feet, our capacity for joy or sadness or awe or hope, the way we eat or dress or build a home or the manner in which we give birth or bury our dead or enter into marriage.

There is one mitzvah, however, that is performed with the totality of the person. When we give a coin to charity, we give our very lives. Because with this coin, we could have purchased the piece of bread that holds body and soul together. And to earn this coin, we devoted our entire being.

With every other mitzvah, we connect to G-d *with* something -- with our mind, our stomach, our home. With "the mitzvah" of charity, we ourselves are the connection. The coin or bill we give is not, physically, a part of us. But it is the essence of what we are.

**BY YANKI TAUBER**

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By Yanki Tauber; based on the teachings of the Rebbe.

Illustration by Yudit Blesofsky

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